The Secondary And Post-Secondary Transition Needs of Native Students

Report Summary

Prepared by the Advanced Education/
Education Interdepartmental Committee on
the Transition Needs of Native Students

Edmonton
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Background

The Departments of Education and Advanced Education recognize that improving educational opportunities for native people may require changes in the existing programs and services. As a result, in early 1989 the departments established an *Interdepartmental Education Committee on the Transition of Native Students from Secondary to Post-Secondary Education and Employment* which became known as the "Transition Committee".

Committee members were: Audrey Breaker, County of Wheatland (south), Carl Urion, University of Alberta (north), Denis Wall, Alberta Education (co-chair), Fred Sonoda, Advanced Education (research), and Ralph Westwood, Advanced Education (co-chair). Beginning in March 1989, the Committee met with 119 invited participants, including native students, native parents, teachers, counsellors, instructors, administrators, band and settlement representatives, government officials and representatives of the general public. The Committee also received 39 completed questionnaires. Meetings, which were organized around school and post-secondary issues, were held in Lethbridge, Calgary, Edmonton (two days), Grande Prairie, Peace River and St. Paul.

The Committee considered the verbal and written advice provided by participants, and then made their recommendations. The nine key recommendations fell into four categories: public schools ECS-12 (public and separate schools); up-grading/adult basic education programs; post-secondary career programs; and post-secondary university degree programs. The Committee submitted its report and recommendations to the deputy ministers of Advanced Education and Education on January 11, 1990.

The Committee found that few (if any) "intentional" institutional barriers prevent native students from making a successful transition from secondary to post-secondary education and employment. However, there are many circumstances within communities, and in the basic and post-secondary education systems, that tend to limit the progress of native students, (or are perceived to limit their progress). Apparently, a combination of circumstances contribute to the fact that significantly fewer students of aboriginal ancestory complete high school or a post-secondary program than is the case for non-native Albertans. Many of these circumstances are entrenched; they will not be corrected by a "quick fix". Nonetheless, other situations are changing: native students, native parents, local communities, school jurisdictions, post-secondary institutions and society in general now have higher expectations for native students, and many new initiatives are underway.

A summary of the issues identified and information presented to the Committee is attached as Appendix A.

Following is a summary of the Committee's key recommendations for action along with the specific actions being considered or currently underway (by either Alberta Education or Alberta Advanced Education or both).

Key Recommendations & Actions

Adult Basic Education

There is a critical need for a clear policy with clear objectives in adult basic education and academic up-grading. There are many literacy, adult basic education, and up-grading programs, and they are fairly well dispersed throughout the province. Such initiatives, however, occur more or less randomly. Also, there are many structural impediments to student access, and there is very little continuity between programs in some communities. The Committee felt that this problem had reached critical proportions.

Recommendation:

- that Advanced Education undertake a comprehensive review of adult basic education programs frequently enrolling native students. This review should consider how issues such as access, coordination, curriculum content, credit recognition, and student support, should be addressed so that the native students involved in these programs can achieve their goals and progress to post-secondary education and employment.

Action: Advanced Education

Advanced Education, in cooperation with Alberta Career Development and Employment, and other government departments is undertaking a review of literacy and adult basic education programs. Three groups are addressing different aspects of this topic:

(a) The Alberta Literacy Inventory Project was a one and a half year-long survey of all literacy, adult basic education and upgrading programs in the province. School boards, post-secondary institutions, further education councils, and involved community agencies participated in the inventory. The project was completed in July 1990. Directories are being sent to all participants and interested agencies. The final report will be circulated later.

(b) The Literacy Policy Development Committee, chaired by

Advanced Education, has representation from all affected provincial departments. Advanced Education will take the lead role in recommending to government a comprehensive policy on literacy and literacy related programs.

(c) An Advanced Education Advisory Committee on Adult Development Programs is developing policy alternatives and guidelines to coordinate upgrading and adult basic education programs more effectively. The Department of Career Development and Employment along with other government departments jointly provide these programs.

Program Policy and Funding

The Committee was repeatedly informed that funding for native education, at all levels of the educational system, tends to be inconsistent and that continous funding depends on well established education policies and priorities.

Recommendations:

- that, where circumstances warrant, school jurisdictions, post-secondary institutions, and government agencies/departments make ongoing program and/or policy commitments to native education initiatives.

- that effective monitoring and evaluation of programs for native students be established to ensure that programs meet the objectives they were established to achieve.

Action: Advanced Education

(a) Advanced Education provides ongoing funding to the Alberta Vocational Colleges, particularly at Lac La Biche and Lesser Slave Lake, to offer programs and support services frequently utilized by native students in many communities in Northern Alberta. This will continue and will be enhanced as warranted, e.g., new facilities and services at AVC - Lesser Slave Lake.

(b) Advanced Education is developing a new policy statement on native education. The policy will be a basis for planning, and for assisting the institutions to assess the adequacy of their programs and services for native students.

Action: Alberta Education

The Native Education Project is a major initiative of Alberta Education. Native education grants to school boards continue to be a priority funding area for the department.

Research

There is a considerable lack of data on the experiences of native students in the Alberta public/separate and post-secondary systems. Decisions about the types of programs offered, where they are offered, and what the objectives are, should be based on accurate and current data.

Recommendation:

- that a comprehensive and coordinated system of research and information storage be developed through commitments of resources by government agencies and universities.

Action: Advanced Education

Advanced Education, in cooperation with the post-secondary institutions, is updating the 1988-89 survey of post-secondary programs and services for native students.

Action: Alberta Education

Alberta Education regularly monitors the progress of the Native Education Project. The department is also developing a student registry which will make it possible to track students throughout their educational careers.

Native Student Support Programs

Many of the people who made presentations to the Committee stressed that a major issue for native students is a lack of support services. Students need help to plan their programs and to get through difficult experiences while they are in the education system.

Recommendation:

- that schools and post-secondary institutions, where numbers warrant, provide effective native support services.

Action: Advanced Education

The Students Finance Board, in cooperation with Alberta Family and Social Services and Alberta Career Development and Employment, is considering a process to coordinate better provision of the student support funding that is available from Alberta Vocational Training, The Students Finance Board and other sources.

Action: Alberta Education

Native education grants to school boards allow individual boards to meet local student support needs. Alberta Education has also supported the development of a counselling handbook oriented to native students.

Staffing and Training Programs

The number of native staff members in our educational institutions is not in proportion to the numbers of native students being served. There is also considerable need to train staff in intercultural and native education.

Recommendations:

- that at each level of the educational system, those responsible for hiring and training staff make commitments to hire appropriate numbers of qualified native people.
- that staff have intercultural or native education training where native students are being served.

Action: Advanced Education

(a) Advanced Education will communicate with all of the post-secondary institutions about the goal of increasing the number of native staff. (Advanced Education, through the Alberta Vocational Colleges has native individuals on staff.)

(b) Advanced Education, in cooperation with the faculties of education and interested native communities, is developing a plan for pilot testing the delivery of B.Ed. training in rural areas to prepare native and local people to work as teachers in native communities.

Action: Alberta Education

(a) Alberta Education has native individuals on staff.

(b) The Native Education Project helps school jurisdictions provide inservice programs for teachers on native education.

Cultural Recognition, Participation and Consultation

Native people must be involved in the development and management of programs, **at the very least** in an advisory capacity. Their involvement will ensure that the programs offered are appropriate to the students and the communities for which they are designed, and that the community and parents have a commitment to the programs.

Recommendation:

- that, where significant numbers of native students are being served, school jurisdictions, post-secondary institutions, and government agencies/departments establish native advisory groups to provide advice on the appropriateness of programs offered. This should be done with due regard to the various communities of native people who are being served.

Action: Advanced Education

Advanced Education will review this goal with all of the post-secondary institutions and, where appropriate, action will be encouraged.

Action: Alberta Education

Native education grants support native parent advisory groups in each school jurisdiction which has a Native Education project.

Coordination

Participants in regional meetings repeatedly pointed out how important it is that public schools, post-secondary institutions and government departments involved in native education initiatives co-ordinate their efforts to ensure that there is equitable access for native students to high quality programs.

Recommendation:

- that where feasible, school jurisdictions, post-secondary institutions, government, native and teacher organizations co-ordinate their activities in native education.

Action: Advanced Education

(a) Advanced Education, in cooperation with the departments of Education, Career Development and Employment, and Municipal Affairs is working with the Metis Association of Alberta to identify specific program objectives and to coordinate better educational programs and services for Metis students.

(b) Advanced Education is working with other provincial and federal departments to improve the coordination of government programs for native people.

Action: Alberta Education

The Native Education Project works closely with other government agencies and native organizations to enhance coordination.

Student Access to Programs and Funding

Native students are generally under-represented in the education system after junior high school. The numbers of native students attending secondary and post-secondary schools are increasing but there is still a need for the Alberta educational systems to be structured so that native students are encouraged and supported in their efforts to successfully complete their education. This structuring should include local delivery and distance education initiatives as well as funding for specific native student programs.

Recommendations:

- that all levels of the educational system make available coordinated and adequate information about programs and funding.

- that when student support funding for native students is being considered their financial, family, travel, and counselling needs be included as part of the review of funding required.

Action: Advanced Education

(a) The Students Finance Board circulates information on student support to school counsellors, all post-secondary and all Alberta Career Development Centres in the province.

(b) Native students have equal access to loans and bursaries from the Students Finance Board.

Action: Alberta Education

Monitoring the use of native education grants allows for adjustments to services as required.

Curriculum and Program Quality

The Committee was reminded on several occasions that curriculum offered by various levels of the education system must recognize native people and their perspectives.

Recommendations:

- that school jurisdictions, post-secondary institutions and government departments ensure that native perspectives are incorporated in curricula, e.g., in native studies programs or as elements of course content.

- that courses offered to native students have high and well recognized standards, and that the quality of education received in these programs allow for transfer of credit to higher level programs.

Action: Advanced Education

Advanced Education will communicate with all the post-secondary institutions about incorporating native perspectives in their curricula.

Action: Alberta Education

The Native Education Project has assisted in the development of basic social studies resources and other curricula that recognize native perspectives.

Appendix A

A SUMMARY OF COMMENTS FROM THE REGIONAL MEETINGS TRANSITION NEEDS OF NATIVE STUDENTS

Prepared by the Interdepartmental Education Committee on the Transition Needs of Native Students July 12, 1989

Participants:

During March and April, the Committee met in six regions of the province with people involved in native education. Thank you for your participation by attending one of the meetings and/or by submitting a completed questionnaire.

At the meetings, we indicated a follow-up summary would be sent to each participants so they would have a provincial overview of what was said and an opportunity to comment further if they wished. The following summary is an attempt to capture the results of all the meetings.

The summary is intended to just report what was said and what the Committee understood. While the comments and suggestions are highly valued for information about individual and group perceptions, inclusion in this summary should not be understood to necessarily indicate agreement by the Departments of Advanced Education and Education or the majority of the participants.

Thanks again for your ideas and observations, and for your interest in improving educational opportunities for native students. If you would like to make additional comments, please call or write Denis Wall (427-2043) or Ralph Westwood (427-5634).

Yours sincerely,

Denis Wall/Ralph Westwood
Co-Chairpersons
Interdepartmental Education Committee
on the Transition Needs of Native Students

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

BACKGROUND

The Departments of Education and Advanced Education recognize that to improve educational opportunities for native people changes in the existing programs and services may be required. As a result, the department established an Interdepartmental Education Committee on the Transition of Native Students from Secondary to Post-Secondary Education and Employment to meet with people throughout the province and to listen to their suggestions and recommendations regarding transition issues as they affect native students moving from school to post-secondary education and employment.

The "Transition Committee" was composed of Audrey Breaker, County of Wheatland (south), Carl Urion, University of Alberta (north), Denis Wall, Alberta Education (co-chair), Fred Sonoda, Advanced Education (research), and Ralph Westwood, Advanced Education (co-chair). Beginning in March 1989, the Committee met with 119 invited participants and received 39 completed questionnaires. The participants were native students, native parents, teachers, counsellors, instructors, administrators, band and settlement representatives, government officials and representatives of the public-at-large. The meetings were organized around school and post-secondary issues and were held in Lethbridge, Calgary, Edmonton (two days), Grande Prairie, Peace River and St. Paul.

ISSUES

The Committee meetings and completed questionnaires pointed out a number of fundamental issues that are repeatedly reflected in native education.

1. Early School Leavers

Early school leavers are many. There are dramatically more native early leavers than non-native (Alberta Native Affairs, 1985). According to the Assembly of First Nations "twenty percent of Aboriginal students complete grade 12, compared to 75 percent for other Canadians" (Erasmus, 1989). The native student population is growing and many are staying in school longer but there appears to be still a considerable drop-out rate in junior and senior high school. Information is lacking on drop-outs in various parts of the province. While statistics are not available, the numbers of native students who later return to take adult upgrading courses can be expected to grow in

line with the increase in the age of the young adult population. Also of note is the fact that 96 percent of the early school leavers interviewed in a 1989 MAA study (Metis Association of Alberta, p. 15) reported that they would return to school if they had the chance.

2. Trust

Constructive interpersonal relationships and trust are important in the educational system. The questionnaires returned to the committee indicated uncertainty by the respondents that their interests would be served. The responses indicate this is a large factor in the educational lives of native people. Comments such as the following were numerous:

> " ... negative expectations from some teachers and peers do exist."
>
> "Native students do not seem to be encouraged to plan for a university program."
>
> "All students regardless of race should be treated equally ... ."
>
> "... native students have to fight against discrimination. This is a hindrance, especially when a student has to keep their mind on their studies."

Discussions of self-concept often suggest that students feel badly about themselves because of their experiences in the educational system. The "Early School Leavers Report" (1984), the Alberta Education native education policy, and other documents suggest that students would remain in school longer if indeed there was a greater degree of acceptance and they felt they had more positive interpersonal relationships in school.

3. Diversity

There is often a perception that native students constitute a single, cohesive population in the educational system, all of whom have a similar way of behaving and similar social circumstances. This perception is inaccurate; for in any population there is wide diversity. In Alberta it is also important to note there are significant differences in the communities in which native people live. It is significant that approximately 40 percent of native people live in urban centres. The result is that there are very different educational needs for native students in rural and urban communities, as well as in the north and in the south of the province, especially with respect to distance education delivery. In education, there must continue to be consideration given to the needs of specific communities and to the educational development of individual students.

4. Self-government

The Canadian Constitution Act (1982, Section 25 and 35) recognizes native people, including Status Indians, the Inuit and the Metis, as having aboriginal rights. It is not clear at this point the full extent to which this new constitutional context will affect the delivery and development of education for native people in Alberta; however, the effects appear to be at the public school levels at this time.

As aboriginal rights are further developed, self-government will be a continuing issue for Status Indians and Metis people, and it is likely to affect provincial education policy and program delivery in the future.

WHAT WAS SAID

This newsletter summarizes the verbal and written comments of the people who answered the questionnaires and attended the committee meetings. The information is reported under the following topics:

1. Public Schools K to Grade 12;
2. Upgrading/Adult Basic Education Programs;
3. Post-Secondary Career Programs; and,
4. Post-Secondary Degree Programs.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS K TO GRADE 12

There is a native education policy for Alberta's public schools. The document "Native Education in Alberta's Schools" was published in 1987 and focuses on many of the issues for native students raised in the "Early School Leavers Report" (1984), the "Report of the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding" (1984) and in the document "Native Education in Alberta: Alberta Native People's Views on Native Education", (1987).

The concerns raised with the Transition Committee included many of the same issues. One of the main points is the need for improved teaching, and administration by individuals who understand intercultural issues and who are working toward a more effective educational process.

1. Commitment

Participants frequently requested that the public schools employ more qualified native staff at both the professional and paraprofessional level. Fifty-six of approximately one-hundred and fifty school jurisdictions (37%) in the province have initiated native education projects. Many are using Alberta Education produced and other native content resources for all their students. There was also the feeling expressed that some school jurisdictions need to make greater efforts to commit resources on a continuing basis to native education, not just by way of programming for native students but also for non-native students.

The Native Education Project of Alberta Education was viewed by many as being an initial commitment by the provincial government to native education. The concern for many was a perceived lack of long-term commitment, as reflected in uncertainty about how long the Project would remain. To reinforce an ongoing commitment, it was recommended that all native education programs be regularly evaluated for results achieved.

2. Quality of Education

Although a number of very positive initiatives were reported in specific native education projects, there appears to be a lack of coordinated effort and follow-through. For example, in some cases native liaison workers have been placed in some schools without clear job descriptions or a long-term commitment by the school jurisdiction to support the role. Parent advisory committees have been established. In many cases they work well, but some are having difficulty getting organized without adequate training, advice, or support from the school jurisdictions.

The need for more information about graduation requirements and career planning to community and parents were issues raised often. As well, parent and community support was viewed as an essential element in the students' perception of the need for schooling. It was repeatedly stressed how important a positive foundation in the early grades is to later success in school and post-secondary education. Several ways of improving the current situation were suggested. For example, basic literacy and English as a second language skills might be emphasized, native curriculum content should be made compulsory by Alberta Education in the early grades and school jurisdictions should continue with initiatives to improve student success.

Comments about student support frequently focused on parent involvement and how it should be encouraged through advisory committees, making parents welcome at the schools and informing parents of the work and expectations that are placed upon students. Some people suggested that student support could also include the participation of native elders and community leaders in schools.

It was felt high school programs should be offered in local communities. Students shouldn't have to relocate to regional schools a great distance from home. There was a recognition that Alberta Education's Distance Education initiative has the potential to make specific courses more available to students in isolated areas, but the perception was that it is not meeting the needs of native students at this time.

3. The Transition

Many felt that planning for post-secondary training and a career should begin in junior high school. Across the province a very common perception was the need for more information sharing regarding expectations for students in transition to post-secondary programs. This could be done through career days, where colleges and universities provide necessary information and recruit students. It could also involve local role models who demonstrate what can be achieved through personal commitment.

It was reported that as part of its role, the University of Alberta, Office of Services for Native Students does offer outreach information sessions and recruits native students. The Alberta Career Centres, especially in northern Alberta, were frequently reported to be the primary source of information about the various post-secondary programs and sources of student support funding.

In addition it was suggested that more effective support services be provided to native students in high school. The services could include counsellors, course planning, tutors, peer support groups, native student clubs, and peer counselling.

Other issues raised were the need for counsellors to work with students in the context of their whole school experience, not just by meeting separately with students in an office for a few minutes. Several people pointed out that it is important to match educational programming to students expectations and abilities. Some people said that native students appear to be counselled to leave

school, rather than the schools taking responsibility to help students achieve their full potential.

And finally, even though more native students are completing high school, there was agreement they still face difficulty in finding employment. A good deal of information is lacking on where high school native students go after high school, for example, how many drop out, how many graduate and the proportion that take post-secondary training.

UPGRADING/ADULT BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS

There are a great number of upgrading and adult basic education programs in Alberta and that the participation rate of native students appears to be the highest in northern and rural regions. Few respondents to the questionnaires or participants in the meetings said that programs were simply not available. Instead, what appears to be required is an increased understanding of how future local economic and demographic situations will affect which upgrading programs are offered, how and where they should be delivered.

1. Funding

One of the most frequent comments about such programs was that student funding available was short-term and often unrelated to an individualized program plan for the student. As a result students could lose their funding support if they took too much time to complete a certain program, or if they discovered in mid-stream that the program they were enrolled in was inappropriate. Also, levels of student funding were often seen as barely meeting basic needs, and in some cases not adequate, particularly for northern students who have extra transportation costs.

Irregular program funding was seen as problematic: e.g., a program might run for one, two or more years but it did not appear to be subject to long-term planning. Frustration was also expressed regarding a lack of coordinated funding between different agencies (e.g. AVT, Indian Affairs, Family and Social Services, and Students Finance Board). As a result, students often could not make long-term plans with any degree of certainty.

2. Adult Learners

The committee was told about the need to relate upgrading and adult basic education programs to the needs of adult students. It was suggested that funding agencies, instructors and administrators need a better understanding of the needs of the adult student, whether those needs involved maintaining family responsibilities, alternative teaching methods or curriculum content.

Counselling services for adult students appeared to vary throughout the province. In some instances, certain individuals and agencies were commended for providing excellent career and funding information. The Career Development Centres in the Peace River area were commended for their ability to help prospective students. However, the general theme was that coordinated counselling, planning and information were lacking, both before entering a program and while in the program. In addition, it was frequently suggested that more funding be provided for support services such as day care, transportation and facilities in northern Alberta.

3. Program Quality

The perception of many participants was that frequently there are significant differences between the expectations of students and the vocational objectives of funding for programs. They said this sometimes results in students being enrolled in programs to collect a training allowance. Instead, students in these programs should be able to move on to employment or to another level of education. The quality of the programs and the transferability of credit from one program to another was frequently questioned. Participants frequently suggested that programs and services designed to assist native students be regularly evaluated for results achieved.

POST-SECONDARY CAREER PROGRAMS

One positive example of government action is the Intergovernmental Committee on Native Employment. It is attempting to coordinate provincial and federal government training and employment initiatives.

While there are a great number of programs (business, trades, careers and so on) available in Alberta which native students attend (see "Students of Native Ancestry - Enrolments, Programs and Support Services", 1988, Advanced Education), many participants said there is a need for improved access and coordination. It was suggested that government and the post-secondary institutions coordinate their energies to ensure that there is an ongoing continuum of program options available so

that native students can pursue individual educational plans.

1. Funding

Many of the participants said there should be special bursaries for Metis students with financial needs. One example is the Department of Family and Social Services bursary for students taking social service career training.

As well, it was felt that funding lacked coordination. Students and instructors reported that the mandate regarding federal and provincial responsibility for funding Indian post-secondary education is both confusing and frustrating. There is considerable confusion among students regarding regulations and procedures for obtaining student assistance. For example, some Indian students are obliged to apply to as many as four agencies before they are able to get assistance, e.g., Indian and Northern Affairs (INAC), Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC), Alberta Vocational Training (AVT), and the Students Finance Board (SFB). Several students complained that funding levels from AVT and the SFB are low for northern students who have to travel considerable distance to school.

Status Indian students and community representatives stressed that federal funding for post-secondary education is seen by them as a treaty right. Indian students strongly disagree with the plans of Indian Affairs to cap funding.

2. Support Programs

Participants emphasized a lack of support services for native students, which should include counsellors, tutors, peer support, student clubs and assistance with job search. It was felt there should be more information sharing between post-secondary institutions, career centres and other agencies and that there should be more native staff. Participants frequently commented that institutions tend not to welcome students or show evidence that the institution values native culture and native students.

3. Program Delivery

There were a number of questions about the purpose of post-secondary education. Is it preparation for adult living? Is it assimilation? It was suggested that institutions should carefully identify the purpose and objectives of their native education offerings to ensure that it is relevant and consistent with the expectations of students and the local community. There was also seen to be a lack of commitment to address native issues.

Institutional and community representatives strongly supported locally delivered programs that were built upon existing community projects and directly involve community leadership. The use of unique support programs was encouraged, such as the Sunrise Project at Slave Lake. Several people recommended that institutions link their program plans to the economic development of the region and that instructors adapt their program delivery to the learning style of native students. Some career programs were viewed as lacking the quality and credibility necessary to be considered for transfer of credit. It was felt that programs should be designed with regard to:

- understanding the student's prior experience;
- significance of the program to the student;
- the needs of the individual student;
- how competent the student feels; and,
- how student success is directly affected by his/her goals and interests.

Other suggestions were that English as a Second Language (ESL) courses should be made available when appropriate to native students whose first language is not English; students should have choices of both full and part-time programming; and institutions must take greater responsibility for the success/failure of the students.

On the perceived need for more and better information about native issues, some initial steps have been taken to compile data on native education and employment. One example is the Native Resource Inventory System (NRIS), a data base on research information. There is, however, a lack of current data on native education. There is a need to involve native communities in research and work with them to build trust in the purpose and objectives of research.

POST-SECONDARY DEGREE PROGRAMS

There are programs at Alberta's post-secondary institutions which recognize the specific needs of native students. Three of the four universities have special departments that provide support services for native students. These institutions also offer some programming that focuses on native studies.

1. Access

One of the major concerns expressed to the committee was about the accessibility of post-secondary programs for people living in remote areas. The impression was that only a few institutions reach out to students in these areas; there is no recognized comprehensive province-wide form of distance education or outreach delivery. The programs offered for home study by Athabasca University were reported to lack the personal and classroom support required by many native students.

2. Transition Programs

A second major issue was the funding of transition programs. The impression of those at the meetings was that often funding was kept to a minimum because of other institutional priorities. These programs were viewed as essential to post-secondary programming for many native students. Specifically mentioned as high quality transition programs were the Career Development Institute (Concordia College), University College Entrance Program (several locations), and the Aboriginal Transitional Year Program (U of A).

3. Priorities on Native Programs

With regard to the priorities of post-secondary institutions and the programs and support systems offered, the general impression from many post-secondary institutional personnel was that they are uncertain about what is required in the area of native student services and programs. The need appears to be for more information (e.g., what programs native students enroll in, demographics, student impressions, drop-out rates) for the institutions to make priority program decisions based on up-to-date information about native educational needs.

Student support systems, including both peer support or counselling services, were seen as essential to most native students in post-secondary education.

4. Funding

Student funding was discussed in terms of the source and level of funding. Indian Affairs funding was frequently reported as being inadequate especially in regard to maintenance, child care, and supplemental tutoring. Comments suggested that status Indian students often applied to the provincial Students Finance Board to supplement their resources.

There was a consistent theme throughout about student debt as a result of receiving provincial loans or the Northern Alberta Development Council Bursary. Fear was reported repeatedly that such loans were very burdensome especially when the prospect of getting work following a program was uncertain. Some of the participants felt that even though native students may graduate with a degree, it would be difficult to find an appropriate job which would enable them to pay back their loans. This concern appeared to be linked to several requests that more consideration be given to employing qualified native people in all fields, but especially in the educational system.

5. Institutional Relations

The relationships between the post-secondary system and the public school system were discussed in terms of the lack of information to prospective students about programs, funding and student supports. In a few instances the institutions do have counsellors who visit school systems and actively recruit native students. In some instances there are individual high school counsellors who have considerable information and are able to direct students into the appropriate programs. But the general impression is that much more needs to be done to improve the linkage and coordination between the two levels of the education system for native students.

6. The Training of Professionals

A final theme in committee meetings was that teachers, administrators and others trained in faculties of education need basic training in intercultural and aboriginal education. The implication being that teachers and administrators (whether native or non-native), who are sensitive to intercultural issues, are better able to make schools more positive environments where native students feel comfortable, because they were understood and respected. It was also suggested that the universities increase their research activity into issues of intercultural education.